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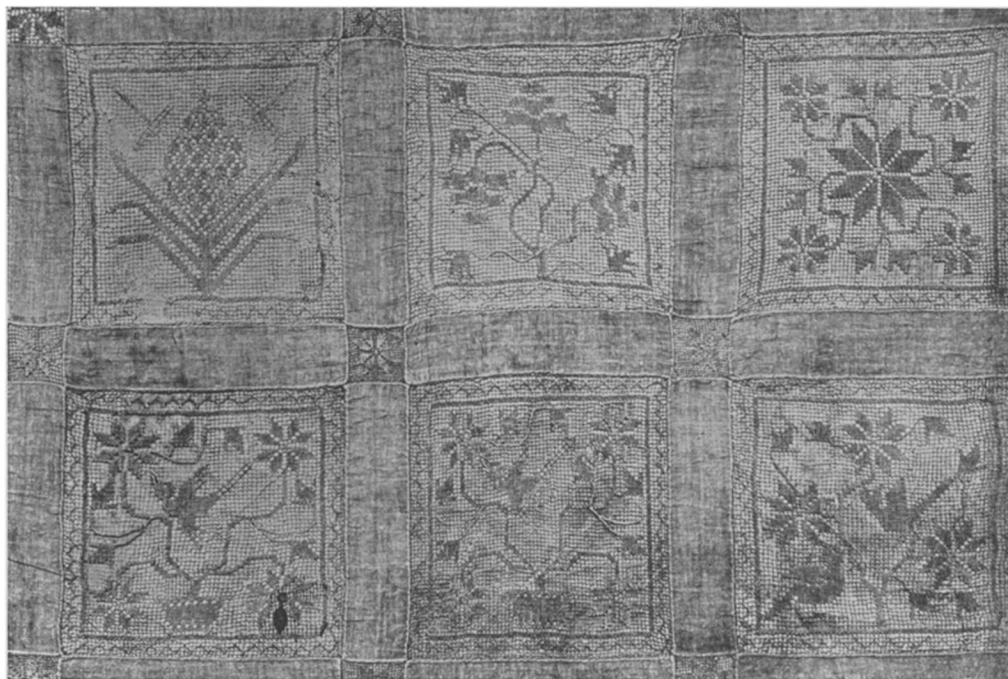
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Detail from Curtain of Netting

Buddhist Paintings From Northern India or Tibet.

THE Museum collection of Oriental art has just been enriched by the gift from Mr. Edward W. Forbes of a number of the objects recently obtained by him in Northern India. Others have been loaned by Mr. Forbes, among them the painting reproduced on p. 53, which is shown among several Lamaist and Buddhist paintings, gifts and loans, in the Japanese corridor.

This picture shows no trace of Tibetan Lamaism as we know it, but is purely Buddhist and of the southern school in its subject. In manner, method, and medium, however, we must class this with the Tibetan and Nepalese pictures that we already know. It seems improbable that the tribes of the Himalayas had any well-developed arts of their own. They appear to owe to Indian, Afghan, and Persian captives, and to Chinese traders, whatever paintings were produced there. If, then, this picture of the Buddha was painted among the hill tribes, we need not be surprised to find the incidents and scenes that the artist has chosen quite orthodox and untainted by the devil-worship of Lamaism.

The mounting of this, like that of all the pictures of the region which we have seen preserved un-restored, is purely Chinese. The stick at the bottom of the roll seems to be of pine, and the ends are whittled probably to be fitted with copper or silver-plated tips, such as some of the other pictures in the collection bear. Edging the cotton on which the picture is painted are faded but still gorgeous Chinese brocades, and over the whole hangs a

tawny veil of silk to ward off the gaze of the profane and to protect the surface when rolled.

The central figure is the Buddha himself, in the pose known as "Indestructible," with his hands in the "witness" attitude, calling earth to witness in his favor against the accusations of Mara, prince of evil. His skin is of the precious color, gold, and from his body shoot out rays of beneficence, gold against the blue of the heavens. He is seated on the lotus throne; behind his head is an everlasting stupa, or pagoda, bearing the celestial emblems; over his head and down to the throne on each side arches a writhing mass of clouds, from which emerge mythical beasts: the Garuda, which eats snakes, the Nagas, mermaid-like creatures, dragons, dolphins, elephants, and green horses with lions' paws, all doing homage to the Enlightened One.

The rest of the space in the picture is taken up by scenes from the life of Buddha in more or less chronological order from the right-hand upper corner down, then below the lotus throne and up the left-hand side to the final sleep in Nirvana at the top. The figure of Buddha himself may be distinguished from the others in every case by the gold color of his skin.

To the right of the thirteen-storied pagoda which supports the celestial emblems above the head of the main figure, the Buddha appears seated in a cloud before his birth. He is resolved to come among men and to teach them. On his right is the sacred ivory-colored elephant sent as the messenger of the immaculate conception to Queen Maya. Below, Queen Maya lies on her couch before the birth of the Buddha, while outside

her chamber to the left her husband, the Rajah Suddhodana, sits consulting with a wise man about the future of the child.

Below this scene is shown the birth of the young prince who is to save the world. Queen Maya stands beneath a palsa tree and the golden child is seen issuing from her right side, received in a white cloth by two of the old gods.

To the left of this group is the figure of the Blessed One as he appeared when first born, showing his divinity by the rainbow and the sacred canopy, and standing upon the lotus "with brilliant jewels as of flowers round about him."

Below this again are scenes from the boyhood of the young prince. He astonishes his aged tutor, Viswamitra, by writing from memory the sacred books in all the tongues of men, by solving the most abstruse problems in mathematics, and by telling the stars and their changes. Later, as he grows to be a lad, he excels in all manly sports. One picture shows him winning a swimming race, the next hurling down an elephant, and the next shooting his arrows through seven trees in line, each with a shield hung upon it.

Underneath the Buddha-seat of lotus petals is the Pleasure House built by the old Rajah for his son and his son's wife, the beautiful Yasodhara. Here was every form of delight: young companions, great gardens, music, and dancing. The Rajah built about it a high wall and gave orders that no sickness or sadness or death, should come into the life of the prince. But this could not last forever, and the young man begged his father to be allowed to go out to see the world. The city was swept and decked with flowers. The sick and infirm were ordered within doors lest the young prince should learn the meaning of sorrow, but the royal party were met by an old man leaning on a staff and asking alms (the painting shows him in front of Buddha's chariot). The prince, much troubled, asked his attendants what ailed the man, and was told that it was the common fate of all men to grow old.

At the bottom of the scroll in the centre Buddha is in his chariot again, on a second excursion beyond the walls. This time he sees a sick man and learns another evil. On the third day a corpse (below the palace to the left) is carried by, and he sees Death.

Next in the history is seen the prince preparing for flight on his horse Kantaka, attended by the faithful Channa. From the head of the kneeling horse rises a thin cloud which spreads out and shows the Buddha mounted, and Kantaka's hoofs held by the Yakshas of the air, who helped him to escape in silence. The huge bronze doors in the outer wall opened at a touch, and the wanderings of the young prince began.

His first act (shown to the left of the galloping horse) was to cut his long hair with his sword and to send Channa back with his royal clothes and Kantaka, the steed.

For five (some say seven) years Prince Siddhartha investigated the existing religions and philosophies. The lower left-hand corner of the painting shows him consulting with the holy Yogi of the forest, and just above he speaks with the mountain ascetic. During his meditations he led so pure and holy a life that the villagers were glad to bring food to his begging bowl and ask his blessing on their families and herds. Five old men became his disciples during this period, but left him in disappointment when he rejected the hardships of the Yogis and refused to mortify his flesh. Wearied after the fasting and meditation, the Holy One sat at evening beneath a Bodhi tree and thought on how to save the world from countless births and rebirths into passion and evil and lust. As he sat, Mara the prince of evil, came to him and tempted him.

On the left of the central figure is shown the Buddha under the Bodhi tree, ringed with flames and devils and tempted by lusts incarnate. All night they threatened him and sought to bribe and frighten him from his purpose. The heavens split above his head and lightning struck round about. Demon armies attacked him and lovely women beckoned, while the Ten Chief Sins whispered in his ear. But when morning came he sat unshaken, — Enlightened, "the Buddha;" firm in his resolve to save the world. He had routed the armies of Mara, and men and beasts came to worship and give praise. He had achieved Nirvana.

"Him the gods envy from their lower seats,

Him the three worlds in ruin should not shake;

All life is lived for him, all deaths are dead;

Henceforth is no more change."

When the Enlightened One rose from beneath the Bodhi tree he went to Benares, and there in a Deer Park outside the city preached to the five who had left him when he had rejected self-torture and starvation. They gladly accepted the new faith and became Bodhisattvas, holy men who tread the way.

From the scene of the temptation up to the top of the picture are shown different episodes in the later life of Buddha: his delivering the sutras in the Deer Park, and preaching to the kings of heaven and to the nine hundred in the Bamboo Grove.

At last he is shown stretched out at length, "lying on his right side as lions lie," falling to sleep for the last time, sure that there is to be no awakening. For he has been freed from the "desire that brings us back again to earth." His disciples sit about him mourning, and above are heavenly hosts waiting to receive him. Maya, his mother, who died when he was but seven days old, is among them, with arms stretched out for her holy son.

Above his bed and to the left is a flaming urn in which his body was burned, while still to the left are "The Eight Glorious Offerings," "The Eight Glorious Emblems," and "The Seven World Ravishing Gems." L. W.



The Story of Buddha
Painting from Northern India or Tibet